

# **A Critical Analysis of Female Depictions in Pakistani Drama: Using a Mixed Methods Approach**

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## **Abstract**

The goal of this research is to establish the current subject of dramas in Pakistan. The study focuses on the representation of women's images in Pakistani dramas. The study tries to find out how Pakistani media depicts the role of women in society, either close to reality or the opposite. The researcher followed a mixed-method approach, incorporating a systematic literature review, a survey, and content analysis of Pakistani dramas to investigate the phenomenon. Total 20 research studies were examined, out of which 12 research papers coincided with the topic using the purposive sampling technique. The survey population for the study consisted of 120 viewers. The researcher approached the Normative theories and fielded the questionnaire including the queries regarding the common perception about the representation of women in Pakistani drama serials. The study reveals that women objectification and stereotyped characters are the top trends gaining huge ratings. The study investigates the behavior and reaction of people regarding the depiction of women's roles in dramas and also evaluates the impact of these dramas on women themselves as well as on society. The study's outcomes reveal that Pakistani television series missed the mark in reflecting the true picture of Pakistani women within the context of cultural values and norms, leading to a lack of viewer satisfaction.

**Keywords:** *Female depictions, systematic review, male dominance, Pakistani dramas, Pakistani media*

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Television has had a tremendous impact in bringing about revolutionary developments. In the entertainment world. These days, despite the Cyber revolution and digital media, the television still balances and manages a great impact on our society. It plays a vital role in changing a person's opinion and thoughts. What we see, we observe, we think, we believe in it and implement. Indeed, TV is a strong and powerful source to spread awareness, to educate and to provide information as well as a source of entertainment. But it affects audience's mind and enhance their thinking capability.

Pakistani drama's come on the top of the list in the entertainment domain. As they are usually family centric and a 30 to 40 minutes' roller coaster ride full of emotions, completely captivating, letting the viewers feel the emotions that are expressed in Drama. In these dramas, the whole story plot is woven around the factor "women". In the past few years, mostly dramas portrayed the women as a stronger entity with the empowered and modernized status. As a matter of fact, a working woman should be an independent, strong-willed individual of the society, but unfortunately, they are not accepted and highly criticized by the society. Consequently, they face hurdles in achieving their goal. Working women are then treated like they do not belong to the society and gradually get isolated. For example: If a woman is earning better than her husband, her husband starts feeling insecure eventually taking he matter on his ego. Most of the Pakistani Drama's depict the negative image of the working women in our society. In a Pakistani society it is considered anomalous if they join a field, get independent and empowered, hence the fear of isolation occurs. Here a question arises that aren't we suppose to educate our women? Is it just because of the fear of isolation or society? (Ahmar, 2012)

According to Ashfaq and Shafiq (2018) and Abbas, S. (2018), the negative portrayal of women in Pakistani drama series is against the real cultural norms and values of the country. TV serials like "nand" on aired in 2020 are not just a source of entertainment, they are based on the Indian soap operas and family politics.

### **Objectives of the Research**

- 1- To find out the image of women in Pakistani Society?
- 2- To dig out how the Pakistani TV Serials depict the role of a woman in Pakistani society?

### **Research Questions**

- RQ1: What is the image of women in Pakistani Society?
- RQ2: How the Pakistani TV Serials depict the role of a woman in Pakistani society?

### **Hypotheses**

- H1. There is no difference in the opinion of the people that the Pakistani TV Serials depict the Indian and Western trends.
- H2. There is a difference in the opinion of the people that Pakistani dramas are raising real issues for women.
- H3. There is no difference in the opinion of the people that Pakistani TV serials cast negative impact on individuals.

### **Role of Women in Pakistani Society**

To understand where women stand in Pakistani culture, we must first understand Pakistani society. Pakistan's social fabric is multilingual and cosmopolitan, with few commonalities. Sindhi, Panjabi, Balochi, and Pashtuns are the major ethnic groups of Pakistan, with numerous additional smaller ethnic and linguistic groupings assimilated into Pakistani society.

However, as time passes, it appears that society is changing and people's brains are expanding. People in Pakistan are more appreciative of a woman who can stand on her own in the twenty-first century. A large influx of women has been noticed in the profession of journalism, overcoming all obstacles and rivalries that have arisen.

According to the statistics of the 6th Population and Housing Census (2017), women make up 48.76% of the total population in Pakistan. Women in Pakistan are not considered independent human beings. They are ruled by male family members such as dads, brothers, spouses, and even sons. Women are frequently regarded as a valued and honorable entity inside the family, posing challenges to the traditional notion that women working or earning money is a dishonor to the family and its

males. They are not allowed the freedom to act as they see fit. In the country. (Hussain, 2008).

There is a significant disparity in the lifestyles of urban and rural women in Pakistan. Women are more commonly permitted to vote and obtain higher education in metropolitan regions, where they may easily study up to Masters' Level and can obtain a post-graduate degree. On the contrary, in tribal regions, women are frequently prevented from voting or obtaining an education. Women in Pakistan's big cities are noted to be more self-sufficient. They live their lives immersed in study and professionalism. They even receive scholarships to study overseas. Previously, women could only pursue one profession: medicine; she may have become a medical doctor. However, the situation has completely altered, allowing women to enter and even assume technical positions. (Javed & Aslam, 2017).

The portrayal of women in Pakistani media can be judged in two categories. One is positive and the other one is negative. Pakistani dramas are thoroughly centered by the women themed issues, social and cultural issues in which the viewer get to watch different sorts of endeavors a woman actor play. It has also been an interesting observation that such kind of dramas garners higher ratings.

#### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

The present study fundamentally investigates the women's representation in Pakistani dramas. We have formulated two distinctive, hypothetical customs which are applicable to the comprehension of ladies' generalization in contemporary Dramas in Pakistan. As a fourth state, the media is always supposed to be a watchdog of society, highlighting every wrong doing and beneficial practices of its citizens.

#### **Social Responsibility Theory**

Under the umbrella of normative theories, the theory of social responsibility was introduced. A social responsibility theory is a modified form of the free press idea that emphasizes the media's accountability in society.

The study was carried out under the theory "Social Responsibility Theory" (Normative Theory). According to this theory Media works as a watchdog of the society. It is the Media's responsibility to look after

social problems and issues and raises in order to draw attention of concerned authorities.

### **Cognitive Social learning theory**

Bandura's Theory of Social Learning (1986), postulates about the power of a television programme to launch the process of learning in society, is another theory that has been found applicable to assessing the portrayal of women in Pakistani dramas. The television broadcasts programmes that provide the most recent knowledge and trends, which are then adopted and practised in society. According to the idea, "social cognitive theory defines learning as an internal mental process that may or may not be reflected in immediate behavioural change." (Ibid).

Because it is the job of the media to emphasise societal challenges, whether individually or at the communal level, the theoretical framework supports the major focus of this study. It is the social obligation of the media to raise the attention of responsible authorities or to avert any wrong doing.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

In this cross-sectional research, a mixed-method approach was utilized, involving three sequential steps to gather data and obtain valuable insights into the portrayal of women in Pakistani drama serials. The study employed both survey and content analysis methods, effectively combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. By integrating these diverse approaches, a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon was achieved, enriching the findings and offering a more holistic view of how women are depicted in Pakistani television dramas.

#### **1: Systematic Literature Review:**

The literature review was conducted systematically, considering both national and international researches conducted up to the year 2018. A total of 30 research papers were identified based on the keywords "portrayal of women by media." From this selection, the researcher on the basis of convenience sampling, included only those research papers where the full paper was accessible and available for analysis.

## 2. Content Analysis:

The quantitative part of this study involved data collection through survey questionnaires. The researchers used purposive sampling to select a famous drama serial from ARY Digital and Geo TV, which aired during prime time. The chosen dramas were specifically focused on women's issues and were popular among the viewers, allowing the exploration of women's empowerment as portrayed in these serials.

The names of these dramas are as follows:

- Cheekh (ARY Digital)
- Besharam (ARY Digital)
- Khaani (Geo TV)

## 3. Survey:

A survey was carried out to gauge the audience's perception of the portrayal of women in Pakistani dramas. Employing a purposive sampling technique, the study recruited 120 respondents, who completed the survey questionnaire.

## FINDINGS:

### (1) Systematic Literature Review

Study 1	Contested Images of 'Perfect Women' in Pakistani Television Dramas.
Citation	Ashfaq & Shafiq (2018)
Methodology	Qualitative Content analysis
Sample size	6 popular dramas
Sampling method	Purposive & random sampling
Finding	Objectification of women characters in Pakistani dramas bring on the negative norms

	and beliefs in a society.
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Study 2	Are Independent and Liberal Women Villains?
Citation	Abbas, S (2018)
Methodology	Qualitative
Sample size	6 popular dramas
Sampling method	Purposive & random sampling
Finding	The projection of bold, independent and liberal women as the negative or evil manifests the stereotypic leads opposing trend against the real values offered to a female by a healthy society.

Study 3	The Objectification of Women in Pakistani Television Commercials.
Citation	Ullah (2014)
Methodology	Content analysis.
Sample size	One public and four private channels
Sampling method	Purposive sampling
Finding	The projection of female models in Pakistani advertisements is no less than of a spectacular display and an attractive commodity for both males and females. A female model has to have

	a beautiful face and figure to bank success. The thinness and whiteness of a female model is about the prime concern for commercials in Pakistan. Women's' sexual objectification and projection on television screens give rise to the depression, anxiety, body shaming and psychological disorder amongst the masses.
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Study 4	Portrayal Of Women in Pakistani Media
Citation	Ahmed, Rameez ul Huda & Roshan Amber Ali (2015)
Methodology	Quantitative, survey
Sample size	100 respondents
Sampling method	Simple random sampling
Finding	Women are misrepresented in Pakistani media. Consequently, the nonstop propagation of stereotyped behavior is not altered. Both print and electronic media make money through sensuous content.

Study 5	Portrayal of Women in National and International Advertisements in Pakistani Magazines: Why Need to Rethink
Citation	Raza, H., S., & Noor, S. 2016
Methodology	Qualitative, content analysis



Sample size	Six months' time period
Sampling method	Purposive sampling
Finding	The pasteurization of female models in advertisements are projected in a manner of attention seeking.

Study 6	Portrayal of Women Characters in Selected Contemporary Pakistani Television Drama
Citation	Roy, S. (2016)
Methodology	Qualitative, content analysis
Sample size	Three dramas
Sampling method	Purposive sampling
Finding	Women in Pakistani society are still struggling to achieve significance on political, cultural and economic fronts.

Study 7	Presentation of women role influence by television and its entertainment programs.
Citation	Ch. Aqeel Ashraf and Salman Amin (2015)
Methodology	Quantitative, survey
Sample size	Sample of 360 viewers

Sampling method	Stratified random and convenience sampling
Finding	The data show that female viewers are particularly interested in dramas. And viewers are impacted in their adoption decisions by female models and actresses.

Study 8	Portrayal of women in Television Serials
Citation	Shashi Kaul & Shradha Sahni. (2010)
Methodology	Quantitative, survey
Sample size	120 respondents
Sampling method	Purposive sampling
Finding	Kaul and Sahni conducted effective research on the demarcation of females in Indian culture and its recognition on couples of Jammu Kashmir. It was mentioned that Indian soaps portray the females as young and beautiful super housewives. Indian cleanser shows, too, do not reflect the reality of women's roles in public, and they promote a stereotypical image of women.

Study 9	Mass Media and Women: A Study on Portrayal of Status and Violence
Citation	Muhammad Aslam Parvez & Robina Roshan

	(2010)
Methodology	Quantitative, survey
Sample size	Five PTV Urdu dramas
Sampling method	Purposive sampling
Finding	This article indicates that both male aggression and female violence are victims of their assigned position, as depicted in one-quarter of PTV Urdu programmes.

Study 10	A Qualitative Study of U.S. TV Shows Success in China
Citation	Peiyu Hu (2014)
Methodology	Qualitative study
Sample size	U.S. TV shows
Sampling method	Face to Face Interview
Finding	The study found that young Chinese viewers failed to grasp the United States and its culture.

Study 11	Portrayal of Women's Images in Television Dramas: A Malaysian Case
Citation	Faridah Ibrahim, Yunus & Dil Froz Jan (2017)

Methodology	Qualitative content analysis
Sample size	Five dramas,
Sampling method	-
Finding	The study discovered that traditional generalizations about women's images persist, albeit to a lesser extent.

Study 12	Negotiating The Image of Women in African Drama
Citation	Nogzi Udengwu (2007)
Methodology	Qualitative content analysis
Sample size	Three Dramas
Sampling method	-
Finding	The study explored that woman writer presented a good image in the drama

**(2) Content Analysis:**

**Besharam**

The drama serial Besharam was produced by Humayun Saeed and Shehzad Nasib, written by Sarwat Nazir and directed by Farooq Rind, aired on ARY Digital in year 2016 during prime time slot.

This drama revolves around the love story between a politician from a humble background and a glamorous model associated with the Showbiz

industry. Their marriage is the result of a bet made on a live show. The model willingly embraces his lifestyle and makes compromises in various situations, even sacrificing her career for the sake of their love. In contrast, the drama portrays the model's mother as someone who has been through three unsuccessful marriages, all ending in divorce within a year or two. She is now involved in an affair with a wealthy businessman. The portrayal of the mother in the drama is seen as unrealistic in society, where her actions and willingness to do anything for money, even if it means breaking her daughter's marriage, are not widely accepted. The drama successfully showed the chemistry of a couple who married in a talk show following a challenge and the endeavors of a woman model who is habitual of elite class resources, whole heartedly managed and compromised on every step of her life to adjust in a lower middle class family to prove that women who are independent and successful can also run a successful marriage.

### **Khaani**

Geo TV drama serial “Khaani” produced by 7<sup>th</sup> Sky Entertainment in 2017, written by Asma Jabeen and directed by Anjum Shahzad. This serial is about a sister who struggles to avenge the murder of her only brother who was killed by a short – tempered politician only son. This serial has gained a lot of popularity, but there is not alluring dialogues and capturing scenes. It seems that is all fake. Only girl is going to take revenge, who, after the death of her brother has to take care and to feed her family. This serial has no linked in reality at all. It shows that our law and order and Police forces are of no value. Our Judiciary is not capable to give Justice in such rare cases. These serials are quite far from reality and this is not an issue or problem.

The drama tried to highlight a status of a woman in which she is the victim, the survivor and the avenger as well. Although the drama aimed to present a woman as a strong entity but the lack of factual factor and reality failed to cast the influential theme to portray a woman in a positive way.

### **Cheekh**

Cheekh produced by Big Bang Entertainment Production, written by Zanjabeel Asim Shah, and directed by Badar Mehmood, aired on ARY Digital in 2019 at prime time slot.

The drama was telecasted on ARY Digital. It is the story based on 3 women who are best friends. One of them is very rich and belongs to upper class family. Second one is her sister-in-law and the third one belongs to poor family who cannot even bear their monthly expenses. The girls were trying that her poor friend would get married to the rich friend's brother and after that she can live her life in luxuries. Here's a question arises that Is this the only way to get married to the elite class who have a lot of money, is this the way to get relief out of problems? After that the girl has been killed by that boy and her close friend vows to take revenge and demands justice for her. She faced a lot of hurdles creating by that rich boy. The rich class always depicted as they wear jeans and tops and poor class wears Shalwar Kameez and Dupatta. The boy who has murdered have no guilt and he has his family support. Police have taken bribes to hide the truth. This story is based on a woman who fought hard to get revenge of her friend and stood against the murderer (brother-in-law), his powers and the system with bravery.

The story aims to highlight a power of women who, if dare to, can do the impossibles. But the drama has segments of discrimination in terms of the attire of the poor and upper class. The depiction of women in pant shirts of the upper class and Shalwar qameez dupatta in a lower class resonates stereotyped clothing customs.

### **3- Survey**

The result has been sorted out through a survey in which some questions have been asked to gather information from men and women. The findings are as follows. Out of 120 respondents women with the age group of 25 to 35 years are well qualified and they are also television viewers.

### **Survey results**

**Table 1**

Which of the dramas do you watch the most?	
Khaani	24%
Cheekh	30%
Besharam	25%

The findings in table 1 show that among the total 120 respondents, the 30% have watched the drama of ARY Digital i.e Cheekh, Besharam is lesser with 25%. The drama of Geo TV, Khaani is watched by 24% respondents.

**Table 2**

Do the Pakistani TV serials depict Indian and Western trends specially for women?	
Yes	93.3%
No	6.7%

In response to the question, the table 2 shows that the majority of 93.3% believes that the role of women in Pakistani T.V serials depicted Indian and Western culture and minority of 6.7 % believes that Media is not depicted any culture through T.V serials.

**Table 3**

Do you think that Pakistani dramas are raising real issues for women?	
Yes	79.2%
No	20.8%

The figures in Table 3 reflects the thoughts of respondents that if the media is properly fulfilling its duty in raising real issues, a majority of 79.2% respondents, including Men and Women believe that Media is not raising the real issues and critical problems which women face and minority with 20.8% think that Media is fulfilling its responsibility.

**Table 4**

Do you think that the portrayal of women in Pakistani TV series are far from reality?	
Yes	94.2%
No	5.8%

According to the survey results, figures in table 4 allow us to fathom a majority of 94.2% believe that whatever the content, media shows through serials are not based on reality and they are totally fake. Only minority of 5.8% thinks the media is reflecting the reality through TV serials.



**Table 2**

Do the Pakistani TV series cast negative impact of individuals?	
Yes	67.5%
No	31.7%

Showing the perception of society regarding T.V serials and working of Media, the table 5 shows the figures of Majority with 67.5% believe that Pakistani TV serials have a negative impact on society as well as on individuals and 31.7% of minorities thinks that they have not been influenced negatively.

#### **Hypothesis**

Furthermore, the researcher used the chi-square goodness of fit test to investigate further into the prescribed hypothesis. The level of significance for the all three hypothesis was set at 0.01.

#### **Hypothesis 1:**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference in the opinion of the people that the Pakistani TV Serials depict the Indian and Western trends.

H<sub>a</sub>: There is a difference in the opinion of the people that the Pakistani TV Serials depict the Indian and Western trends.

**Table 6**

<b>Test Statistics</b>	
	Do the Pakistani TV serials depict Indian and Western trends especially for women?
Chi-Square	90.133 <sup>a</sup>
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000

- a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 60.0.

Table-6 provided the test statistic and p-value for the first research hypothesis. It was observed that chi-square test-statistic value was 90.133 with p-value < 0.001. As the p-value was found to be smaller than the pre-defined level of significance i.e. 0.01, this led the researcher to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, it was concluded that there was a difference in the opinion of the people that the Pakistani TV Serials depict the Indian and Western trends.

**Hypothesis 2:**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference in the opinion of the people that Pakistani dramas are raising real issues for women.

H<sub>a</sub>: There is a difference in the opinion of the people that Pakistani dramas are raising real issues for women.

**Table 7**

<b>Test Statistics</b>	
	Do you think that Pakistani dramas are raising real issues for women?
Chi-Square	40.833 <sup>a</sup>
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000

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- a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 60.0.
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Table-7 provided the test statistic and p-value for the second research hypothesis. It was observed that chi-square test-statistic value was 40.833 with p-value < 0.001. As the p-value was found to be smaller than the pre-defined level of significance i.e. 0.01, this led the researcher to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, it was concluded that there was a difference in the opinion of the people that Pakistani dramas are raising real issues for women.

### Hypothesis 3:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference in the opinion of the people that Pakistani TV serials cast negative impact on individuals.

H<sub>a</sub>: There is a difference in the opinion of the people that Pakistani TV serials cast negative impact on individuals.

**Table 8**

#### Test Statistics

Do the Pakistani TV series cast negative impact of individuals?	
Chi-Square	14.700 <sup>a</sup>
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 60.0.

Table-8 provided the test statistic and p-value for the third research hypothesis. It was observed that chi-square test-statistic value was 14.700 with p-value < 0.001. As the p-value was found to be smaller than the pre-defined level of significance i.e. 0.01, this led the researcher to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, it was concluded that there was a difference in the opinion of the people that Pakistani TV serials cast negative impact on individuals.

**DISCUSSION:**

Media has played its vital role in every area whether it is about education, news, awareness, advertisements and entertaining programs. Media is performing well in all areas and getting advanced day by day. In every society, Media works as a watchdog. Media looks after the cultural values and traditions while providing information or spreading awareness.

In our serials women are family centric, playing such vulnerable roles which makes no sense. On one hand the roles of women sometimes show them weak and poor while on the other hand, they are shown stronger than anyone. The way of their dressing is a part of Western Culture.

Drawing insights from the social responsibility theory and the cognitive social learning theory, it becomes evident that the portrayal of women in vulnerable roles within media content contributes to the perpetuation of gender inequality. Since the central theme of most drama stories revolves around men and women, it raises the question of why our media tends to depict women in unrealistic ways.

One possible reason for this portrayal could be to create controversy and increase television ratings (TRPs), as controversial themes often attract more viewership.

In order to determine the public's view about women's role in Pakistani dramas, the survey has been conducted from 120 respondents including men and women. In which majority has stated that our media is inspired from Indian and Western Culture. Our Media is not raising real issues which need to be highlighted. It can have a bad effect on our society. Promoting open relationships in TV dramas is affecting our young generation's mind. The Majority has said that our Media is under the influence of Western culture, casting adverse effects on our society, culture or norms. Our Media is not following and promoting our culture, our values and traditions.

What we see, we learn, we observe and we implement on it. Media's such Content is affecting our youth and promoting vulnerable things which has been changing our culture.

**Conclusion & Recommendations:**

Pakistan is known as the Islamic State with patriarchal norms where the rules and laws are made in the light of Holy Quran and Hadith. As the media form our sentiments, depicting women as being feeble and mistreated casts an adverse impact on the general public. Hence the facts demonstrated that in this cutting-edge age, where ladies and men are considered as the two wheels of a similar truck, Pakistani scholars think that it's exceptionally difficult to relinquish stereotyping women altogether. Most likely these cliché pictures are the after effect of profoundly installed social practices and understanding, however, researcher solidly trust that a cognizant exertion from the media houses should be made to redress this.

There is a requirement for a steady watch on the media depiction of ladies and a particular channel by means of which the overall population can voice their perspectives about media content. The truth is hustling a long way in front of the storylines we see on our screens as an ever-increasing number of ladies are joining the work force, utilizing their abilities profitably.

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